

Beyond the Cardigan

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Senior Division

Individual Website

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I grew up watching reruns of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and was always calmed by his gentle presence. When a teacher suggested I consider pursuing Fred Rogers, I was surprised to learn that he was much more than a TV show host. After viewing Rogers' 1969 Senate testimony in defense of PBS, I was certain there was more to this icon. Throughout his career, Rogers took a stand against violence. The show I loved had messages of pacifism, gender equity, and racial equality. I chose to research Rogers because I wanted to highlight the work he did to enrich children's lives. Rogers is a well-known figure in American history; however, few people recognize the depth of his progressive activism.

I began my research with *Peaceful Neighbor*, a book about the countercultural Mr. Rogers. This helped me structure my site and make historic connections. I searched for material to support my argument that Rogers was a progressive radical. I found *Mister Rogers & Me*, an informative documentary. I requested several books through interlibrary loan in which I found new information. YouTube videos of his public service announcements helped me understand Rogers' true purpose for creating *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, to give children a constant outlet of love. I found photographs to coincide with pages on my site. It was convenient that there is so much visual content: this also proved to be a challenge when deciding what to include. With the vast amount of sources, my bibliography expanded rapidly and required a major commitment of time.

The last three years I competed in the performance category. This year I decided to create a website instead. With the surfeit of visual material, I felt a website would best represent Rogers' passionate stand for peace. I was initially apprehensive about technological aspects of web design, but was pleasantly surprised that Weebly was relatively simple to navigate. I decided on website pages, wrote text, and found quotes to support the themes of each page. It was difficult to choose videos due to the four minute time requirement. At the suggestion of regional judges I searched for criticism of Rogers. I included the little criticism that I found. Lastly, I worked out additional color choices and page designs.

Fred Rogers fits the theme of Taking a Stand because his life's work was advocating for children. Although he did not march in the streets or take a physical stand, it is clear that he modeled activism through his television ministry. He rejected violence on children's television and pioneered a new approach to children's entertainment based on compassion and acceptance. Rogers took a stand by testifying before the Senate and in the *Sony* case. He took a stand against racial injustice and sued the KKK. He was a radical progressive who pushed the boundaries of society from 1968-2003. He educated children on equity and disabilities through his actions of kindness and acceptance on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Rogers took a radical stand for pacifism and inspired a generation of peacemakers.